

Testimony Concerning Raised Bill 6303
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Animal Behaviorist and Trainer

Senator Cassano, Representative Gentile, members of the committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Raised Bill 6303, An Act Concerning Municipal Animal Shelters.

During the year of 2010, I was an Assistant Animal Control Officer in Connecticut and witnessed several accounts of animal cruelty committed by the Animal Control Department, which was operated under the Police Department.

In one instance, a domestic shorthair feline was impounded after being discovered underneath a parked vehicle. The animal was taken to Mattatuck Veterinary Hospital of Waterbury in which the veterinarians informed the supervising officer that the animal had a dislocated femur and severe abscess that caused the limb to swell to twice its size and constantly drain puss and blood. The supervising officer did not leave the animal with the veterinarian, but instead housed the animal in the pound for the next 5 days. The only medication the animal received was Clavamox, an antibiotic. The veterinarian specified that the animal was most certainly in severe pain, but no pain management was provided. I decided to remove the animal from the facility and Our Companions assisted in financially supporting the feline's medical treatment. Only once Our Companions intervened, did the cat receive a leg amputation that removed the infection and he was given a clean bill of health and a new family. The supervising animal control officer did not provide any medical attention aside from the initial veterinary visit nor did she consider the alternative that the animal was unnecessarily suffering and humane euthanasia should be an option if the budget could not allow treatment.

Another instance of cruelty was in the case of a lhasa apso that came in seriously ill. The animal was in the facility for 7 days, during which the animal barely ate or drank. The canine did not move about in his kennel and had to be hand fed wet food. His eyes and ears appeared to be badly infected and his hair was severely matted. After the seven day holding period, the animal was then brought to the veterinarian. It was then discovered that the animal had two broken hips and double conjunctivitis that was so severe the eyes would have to be removed to get rid of the infection. The animal also had double ear infections and hair that was literally peeling his skin off because it was so tightly matted. Only then was the animal euthanized and the veterinarian said the animal was definitely in significant pain the entire week and that it had possibly, aside but being unkempt, been involved in a car accident. This animal suffered in the pound for a week before it was humanely euthanized. The animal showed clear signs of infection and illness, but only the supervising officer was allowed to take animals to the vet and approve veterinary assistance, so the assistant officers had to sit by and watch the animal suffer.

Another case was that of a domestic shorthair feline that came into the facility the day before I worked. I came into the office at 6 in the morning to begin cleaning and feeding the animals. When I went into the cat room, I thought one of the cats was deceased because he was motionless. Upon opening the cage, I found he was breathing, but it was shallow and his visual reflexes were sluggish (when tapping the side of his eye, his blink reflex was slow). At that early

of an hour, the only veterinary clinic that was open was Cheshire Emergency Vet Clinic. I wrapped the animal in a towel, put him in the car and began driving. The animal started to aspirate, so I pulled the vehicle over and began artificial respiration appropriate in felines. The animal began taking shallow breaths again and his heartbeat was weak, but existent. However, the animal passed before we reached the clinic which was 35 minutes away. Upon returning to the facility, the supervising officer informed me she knew the animal has a severe ascarid (roundworm) infestation the day before, but did not provide the animal with significant medical attention. The animal was not given intravenous fluids which are necessary in a severe infestation. Furthermore, the animal should have been humanely euthanized if the infestation was so advanced, but my supervisor informed me both medical treatment and euthanasias are too expensive given the limited budget. However, when I was working there, she re-painted and tiled the cat room and the main office. The town also replaced the kennel doors and was financing a new drainage system. Money that could have been spent saving the lives of animals and preventing suffering was allotted to the physical appearance of the shelter itself.

Animal control officers are not trained in any form of animal behavior or basic emergency medical care. My supervising officer wanted to euthanize a nursing mother for hissing at people, when it is well known in the field of veterinary medicine and animal behavior that nursing mothers typically exhibit aggression until their litter is weaned. This cat never once swatted at or bit any employees in the facility. My supervising officer stated to me "That cat is not leaving here alive." I made many attempts to explain the cat's behavior was very natural and the other assistant officers agreed they had no trouble handling and feeding her, so she was of no danger to employees, but my supervisor said she just didn't like to cat and she had to be euthanized. She told me "If you want to deal with it, you adopt her." So I personally adopted the nursing mother to prevent her from being executed and she is the most affectionate and loving companion.

It was common practice in the animal control facility that animals were not taken to the veterinarian upon impound despite apparent malnourishment and flea/tick infestations. Animals were routinely not given deworming medication, despite worms in their stool or bloody diarrhea (known symptom of coccidia and giardia infestations). The conditions of the work environment and lack of concern for the animals' well-being led me to quit my position as Assistant Animal Control Officer. Unfortunately, I had no authority to create change in the shelter. The lack of education in the field or required training leads to ignorance and negligence in the field. Helpless animals are paying the price for the lack of legislation governing animal control facilities. Many officers care deeply about animal welfare; however, there are no regulations monitoring the officers that euthanize animals on a whim or fail to provide necessary veterinary care. Animals are suffering in facilities all over the state and it is a disgrace that we treat helpless creatures with such little respect and dignity.

Thank you for allowing me to submit this testimony.

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